DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 310 864 PS 018 265

AUTHOR Halliwell, Gail
TITLE Teachers Initiating Change towards More Flexible Curriculum Practices.
PUB DATE Jul 89
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the International Conference on Early Education and Development (21st, Hong Kong, July 31-August 4, 1989).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Classroom Research; *Curriculum Development; Early Childhood Education; Educational Change; *Educational Innovation; Foreign Countries; Group Dynamics; *Grouping (Instructional Purposes); *Information Dissemination; Networks; Teacher Education; *Teacher Role
IDENTIFIERS *Australia (Queensland); Context Effect; Developmentally Appropriate Programs; *Mixed Age Groups

ABSTRACT

This early childhood curriculum study focused on the practical understandings that teachers held about their classroom experiences, as a way of gaining access to the dynamics of curriculum implementation and innovation. Two problems were addressed: (1) the lack of knowledge about the dynamics of curriculum implementation in settings where early childhood curriculum practices were regarded as innovative by a significant proportion of participants; and (2) the need to assist other teachers in their attempts to learn about curriculum implementation. Two research questions provided general guidance for the study. First, what did innovative teachers consider to be important actions and events affecting their work during the early stages of change toward a flexible, developmentally responsive curriculum? Second, how could information gained from these teachers be used to assist other early childhood teachers and student teachers interested in curriculum implementation? Phase 1 of the study involved the gathering of data from a group of teachers in state primary schools in Queensland who used multi-age grouping as a starting point in initiating educational innovation. Phase 2 concerned dissemination of findings and processes in inservice and preservice courses. Findings are discussed. (RH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED310864

TEACHERS INITIATING CHANGE TOWARDS MORE FLEXIBLE CURRICULUM PRACTICES

Paper prepared for presentation in the symposium

TEACHERS DECIDING THE CURRICULUM IN AUSTRALIAN EARLY CHILDHOOD SETTINGS at the conference "Childhood in the 21st Century", International Conference on Early Education & Development (0-6 years), July 31-August 4, 1989, Hong Kong.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Gail Halliwell
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

PS 018655

Gail Halliwell
Senior Lecturer
School of Early Childhood Studies
Brisbane College of Advanced Education.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

In 1988 the state education system in Queensland introduced a new organisational structure and a new policy for curriculum development which may provide the impetus for a general move upwards of the curriculum principles and approaches of early childhood education. There is evidence that the Queensland community would endorse moves to extend the more flexible curriculum approaches now in use in programs for 3 and 4 year olds in the State to curriculum for 5, 6 and 7 year olds. But, while the conditions appear to be in place for such an exciting change, it is possible that the current restricted knowledge base provided for early childhood teachers will impede growth in the desired directions.

INTRODUCTION

Until the 1960s Australian curricula informed by early childhood education principles tended to be in the privately-funded sector, where competing cultural values, beliefs and traditions were less problematic than for those implementing curricula in the public sector. Over the past twenty years in this country there has been enormous growth in the range of settings where early childhood education principles are claimed to be informing curriculum practice. State and territory education authorities began direct sponsorship preschool education in the late 1960s and are now major providers of preschool programs for four to five year olds in a number of states. Nationally, community kindergarten networks continue to be major providers of programs for three to five year olds. The number of agencies sponsoring child care services is increasing and more of these agencies are employing teachers with early childhood education qualifications with the expectation that early childhood education principles will inform practice. After school care is an expanding area. State and national groups are promoting the use of early childhood education principles to inform practice in the first years of primary school.

The early childhood teacher was (and still is) expected to be a creator of a curriculum responsive to a particular group of children and their families. Prior to the 1960s contexts where teachers implemented the curriculum tended to be under the control of groups promoting early childhood education principles and practices. Conventions in thinking about curriculum (or program) planning and implementation focused on the use of developmental theory to inform practice, leading to a narrow and somewhat over simplistic view of what teachers need to know and do in order to implement the curriculum. This application of developmental theory to practice continues to be the dominant way of understanding curriculum implementation in Australia, as it appears to be in the United Kingdom and in the United States. Hence, when observations of teachers working with children in early childhood settings indicates some deviation from practices recommended by theory, the remedy is usually considered to be more translation work by theorists.

> ... it has been left to busy practitioners to devise appropriate plans and practices and, not surprisingly, they have often failed to do so. Many misinterpretations have occurred and the effects that such distortions have had on classroom practice have been well documented in studies of teachers at work (King, 1978; Willes, 1983; Tizard & Hughes, 1984).
>
> (Blenkin & Kelly, 1987: 33)

Teachers have, however, to take into account many more considerations than developmental theory when they become engaged in implementing the curriculum in public sector contexts. They have to establish priorities for action based on professional judgements about needs and educational values. In addition, social and cultural contexts can be powerful forces shaping the curriculum that children encounter, as has been noted in a number of studies into curriculum implementation in early childhood settings (Lubeck, 1985; Berlak & Berlak, 1981; Apple & King, 1977; Sharp & Green, 1975).

In the 1980s early childhood curriculum in Australia is implemented more and more commonly in public sector contexts where traditional early childhood practices may be considered innovative and may compete with other traditions. Teachers working in such contexts in Queensland have reported considerable anxiety in contending with conflicting expectations about appropriate curriculum practices and some have found it difficult to resist pressures to change towards practices more often associated with academic curriculum approaches (Halliwell, 1981; Ashby, 1986). This pressure is not exclusive to Queensland and nor is the difficulty experienced by teachers attempting to use developmental theory to inform practice in contexts where others may be using other theories to justify practice. Early childhood educators in the United States note increasing evidence of academic curriculum practices in public school kindergartens (Spodek, 1988) and in the preschool (Elkind, 1988).

THE TEACHER AND CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION

The teacher as creator of curriculum, as self-directed curriculum decision maker, remains an important theme in early childhood education. Strenuous efforts have been made in the past to avoid the imposition of 'teacher proof' curricular resources which impede the ability of early childhood teachers to respond effectively to children . It is now imperative that efforts are made to learn from experienced teachers about the practical aspects of creating a curriculum within the contexts where they work, which is responsive to learners. Learning from experienced practitioners may provide the information base which will enable other teachers to create curricula which promote the values and beliefs of the field as well as being accepted as appropriate in the public sector contexts of the 1990s and beyond.

These concerns about curriculum theory and practice in early childhood education bear similarities to concerns raised within the general curriculum field some twenty years ago. In 1969 Joseph Schwab startled curriculum theorists and researchers when he claimed that the curriculum theories of that time were 'moribund', offering little that was leading to improvement in education. He suggested that there had been too heavy a reliance on abstract theories and propositional knowledge and on attempts to apply abstractions to the particulars of life in classrooms, and that this approach had proved inadequate. In order to lead to a renaissance in the field of curriculum he called for a focus on learning about the 'practical' aspects of curriculum, on the choices and actions which constitute the working life of practitioners (p.2). He considered that curriculum work would gain from having to come to terms with the realities of making choices and taking action in order to implement the curriculum.

In 1984 Eisner reiterated many of the concerns of Schwab. He noted that there were now many more studies of what was actually happening in classrooms and "some exploration of the meaning of the practical in curriculum thought" (p.204). He considered, however, that there was still a need for the curriculum field to devote more energy to working with teachers to create concepts, categories, theories and terms that reflected the realities of practice (p.208) and to helping teachers "acquire the kind of deliberative skills that are necessary to carry off effectively what Schwab has recommended." (p.209)

It would seem that the concerns of Schwab and Eisner regarding the knowledge generated about curriculum are pertinent to early childhood education in the late 1980s. A number of people commenting on early childhood education have suggested that the current knowledge base is inadequate and must be expanded to include more than technical knowledge about child development framed in abstract, propositional forms (Battersby, 1988; Spodek, 1988; Silin, 1987; Halliwell, 1983; Donmoyer, 1981). The investigation reported on here indicates that the knowledge base should be expanded to include knowledge based on in-depth study of teachers at work. Knowledge framed in the more particularised, context-bound language of practitioners would help in understanding the curriculum implementation process from the perspective of practitioners. It would form one important knowledge base for seeking understandings about how social and cultural contexts shape curriculum and how teachers contribute as professionals to the

process of creating the curriculum.

A CLIMATE FOR EXTENDING EARLY CHILDHOOD CURRICULUM APPROACHES

In the 1980s in Australia there are strong lobby groups advocating that the principles and practices of early childhood education inform the curriculum for 5 to 8 year olds in the first years of compulsory schooling. Three national conferences, the First Years of School Conferences in Adelaide 1984, Sydney 1986 and Melbourne 1988, considered policy regarding curriculum in the first years of schooling, resulting in the development of a national policy statement (1988). The Early Literacy Inservice Course which became available to a high proportion of primary school teachers in every state as a result of Commonwealth government funding, provided an opportunity for teachers of five to eight year old children to acquire knowledge of early childhood education principles and practices.

In Queensland during the 1980s it could be concluded that there is a favourable climate for extending the application of early childhood education principles and practices into schooling experiences for 5 to 8 year olds. Submissions to a major review of education in Queensland (Report of the Committee of Review, Education 2000 Submissions, 1986: 80-81), indicated that those in the community choosing to comment on early education were favourably disposed towards the curriculum approaches of preschool education and wanted to see those approaches extended upwards into the primary school.

Department of Education, Queensland, initiatives which are construed to be supportive of moves to extend early childhood curriculum approaches to 5 to 8 year olds include the distribution in all Regions of teacher inservice kits (*Open Framework Resource Kit,* 1979) and the publication of the*Understanding Children Series,* 1984-88. A discussion paper distributed in 1987, the *P-10 Curriculum Framework,* promotes a philosophy and a set of five categories for curriculum development which early childhood educators consider to be supportive of their philosophies and curriculum emphases. And in 1988, a Division of Schools P-12, was formed to take the place of the old divisional separations of preschool, primary school and secondary school education. Within the new Division there are a range of administrators and curriculum support people for each of four sub-areas within the new Division. One of these is the Early Childhood sector, catering for children aged 4 to 8 years.

The combination of apparent community acceptance of early childhood curriculum practices and system acceptance that 4 to 8 year olds form a group where similar curriculum practices are legitimate provides a climate for change. In early 1986 the investigator came into contact with a group of teachers of 5 and 6 year olds, who were deeply committed to changing the way they implemented the curriculum so that they could 'cater for different developmental levels among children' (Halliwell, 1989: 29). These teachers were excited by the ideals they were pursuing, yet nervous about undertaking exploration in unknown territory. For this group the curriculum practices they wished to introduce were new to them as well as to the local community where they intended introducing them. The teachers conveyed a sense of being explorers about to embark on a voyage into the unknown, with little information available to them about what the journey would be like.

Their interest in change involving ideals they associated with early childhood education, their evident sense of being self-directed in their attempts to change and their desire that someone document their experiences so as to provide information for future travellers, suggested that here was an opportunity to begin investigating an aspect of curriculum implementation that was relevant to the current concerns of many early childhood teachers. This was an opportunity to study the practical knowledge that teachers acquired about the change process, as they went about their work of introducing curriculum practices which local communities considered to be innovative.

A FOCUS ON PRACTITIONER ACTIONS, REACTIONS AND MEANINGS FOR ACTION

Studies of curriculum implementation in early childhood settings tend to be undertaken from the perspective of the outsider, the researcher examining teacher action and teacher thinking through a selected theoretical lens and indicating points of congruence and mismatch between theory and action. For some research purposes this is the appropriate approach. Many educational problems, however, require access to the perspective of the insiders, for it is the actions, reactions and meanings for action generated by participants that provide the clues to understanding life in classrooms. This study sought insider perspectives using interpretive and case study methodologies.

Two problems were addressed, the current lack of knowledge about the dynamics of curriculum implementation in settings where early childhood curriculum practices were regarded as innovative by a significant proportion of participants, and, the need to assist other teachers learn about curriculum implementation. These problems required gaining access to the meanings of the practitioners involved, to the understandings they had achieved about what was involved in the process and to their ways of gaining knowledge which would aid their work. The following research questions provided general guidance for the study:

- What did these self directed teachers consider to be important actions and events affecting their work during the early stages of changing towards a more flexible, developmentally responsive curriculum?

- How could information gained from these teachers be used to assist other early childhood teachers and student teachers interested in curriculum implementation?

The study focused on the practical understandings that teachers held about their experiences, as a way of gaining access to the dynamics of curriculum implementation and innovation. There are, currently, numerous conceptions of what it means to be studying 'the practical' (Clandinin, 1986; Olson, 1987). For this study Giddens' characterisation of 'practical consciousness' indicated a way to seek the information required. According to Giddens' theory of structuration (1979), teachers as social actors know a great deal about the circumstances in which they act and the reasons for their actions, though they hold that knowledge at different levels of consciousness. Only some of this knowledge is held discursively, able to be shared in the more abstract, propositional forms commonly used by theorists. Some knowledge is held unconsciously, accessed only when experience creates discrepancies with what appears to be common sense, leading to reflection about possible different explanations for the experience. The knowledge that practitioners hold about their day-to-day work, the subject of interest here, tends to be held at a 'practical' level, as understanding of a particular work situation where all the various influences on decisions taken are understood as a complex whole, not easily accessed through the more formal techniques of surveys and structured interviews.

Access to teachers' practical knowledge was sought by establishing situations where the discussants could create portrayals of action located in time and space. Talking with teachers within the classrooms where action occurred, asking teachers to keep diaries to record significant events and listening to teachers talking among themselves about their concerns were considered appropriate ways of accessing knowledge held at the practical level. Practitioners had opportunities to refer to actual things and events which were considered to be significant aspects of changing curriculum practice, and the investigator was able to seek further clarification through reference to objects, people or events that happened in the room or to use video or photographs to supplement tape-recorded conversations.

Phase One:

The first phase of the study involved gathering data among a group of teachers working in state primary schools in Queensland and in the first year of their attempts to change towards more

flexible, developmentally responsive styles of curriculum implementation. All were *initiators* of change (in contrast to teachers who might be resisting involvement in innovations imposed by others). All of these teachers were using the strategy of multi-age grouping as a starting point to making the desired changes. Multi-age grouping meant that the teachers would have in one classroom a mix of 5 and 6 year olds (year levels one and two) or a mix of 5, 6 and 7 year olds (year levels one, two and three).

The major data source was a case study of eight teachers in one school, working in four double teaching spaces with up to 50 children aged 5 to 6 years of age. These teachers were asked to keep diaries noting events they considered relevant to their attempts to change. Monthly interviews involving each teaching pair in their classroom were recorded and transcribed and distributed back to teachers for comment and verification. At the end of the year a case study report of the process of change as experienced by these teachers was prepared, examined and verified as an accurate portrayal, by the teachers involved.

Another group of 22 teachers involved in similar changes in other schools were identified and sampled twice during the year using a survey instrument "semantically tailored to the language of (the) sampling population." (Werner & Schoeple, 1987: p.44), to tap into the practical knowledge teachers were generating about their experiences.

During the year teachers involved in multi-age grouping began meeting to share their concerns. The teachers who attended the meetings were enthusiastic about the initiatives they were making and exhibited a strong sense of personal control over the innovation. The dynamics of interaction at the meetings was quite deliberate. The teachers defined the situation as one where they 'shared as equals'. Because the style of discussion at these meetings had that particularised quality, that emphasis on choices to be made about action that Schwab had identified as 'practical', transcripts of these meetings became another data source.

Phase Two:

The second phase of the study involved using the case study, transcribed material from surveys and network meetings, photographs and video clips from classrooms as a basis for sharing information among practitioners and student teachers interested in the types of curriculum implementation investigated here. A range of resources were prepared and used in inservice and preservice courses (Halliwell, 1987; Halliwell & Nicoll, 1987; Halliwell, 1989). One continuing education course was designed for satellite television where the style of interaction noted in face to face networks, was simulated in the distance education mode. The resources proved to be popular with a high proportion of the student teachers and with practitioners who were actually engaged in change themselves. They created less interest among teachers who had little current involvement in curriculum change and among teachers who were looking for technical knowledge, the 'right way' to implement the curriculum.

ESTABLISHING MORE FLEXIBLE PRACTICES

At the beginning of the change process most teachers were concerned about management of a more flexible physical setting - making room for children to move about and finding enough hands-on resources, worrying about whether each child should have a personal space and experimenting with alternative groupings to year levels. Dilemmas occurring at this stage tended to be located in concerns about their own skill levels and in the reactions of children. Frequently teachers commented that they were hampered by 'bad habits' which were once desired skills (for example, correcting mistakes for children, asking closed questions), by the length of time it took to develop skills now needed (for example, learning how to stand back and observe children at work) and the time it took for children to develop new skills necessary for working in more flexible classrooms.

The establishment of a more attractive room, talk and movement in the room and the introduction of games, puzzles and other hands-on resources represented the achievement of their ideal for some of

the teachers but not for others. This was a source of puzzlement for the investigator until a re-examination of the interview data indicated some not so subtle differences in the associations teachers made around the idea of 'development'. The re-examination indicated that some teachers associated the idea of 'responding to developmental difference' primarily with curriculum approaches which provided *hands-on* materials, the opportunity for children to *move* about and *talk* while learning and the use of *attractive displays* of children's work. These teachers tended to separate concerns about 'covering content' from concerns about 'responding to development difference', using tests and check lists to determine developmental levels, responding to children in terms of their demonstrated attainments and sequencing resources according to levels.

> This meant that we had to turn around and stop everything. There were 14 that needed a sort of remedial program. So we had to adandon play and set up three teaching groups, the early readers, the group who needed a clearly sequenced, structured program and the ones who were at year two standard. Because of the special group of year twos we just couldn't afford the time for a full developmental morning. If we allowed those children to have a full developmental morning a third of your day was gone and it was too hard to fit in all of the other things.

> We're getting to the stage with maths where we can start off a maths activity with the whole group and drop groups out. In fact, we have been quite slow in getting our diagnostic testing done for maths. We have completed the ones. That will make our maths a lot more efficient. We will know exactly what the kids can do, where they are in their mathematical development, which we haven't really known.

Other teachers associated the phrase 'developmental difference' with curriculum approaches which enabled them to respond to interests demonstrated by children in the classroom, optimising learning by enabling children to have some control over the learning process and encouraging independent learning behaviour. These teachers worried a great deal in the early stages about balancing content coverage and having the flexibility to respond to children. At network meetings they shared strategies for 'keeping track' of learning when children made choices and 'letting go' control over children's use of time and space and the tasks chosen.

> We felt we had to try something to monitor what they were doing. If you're going to give a lot of free choice time you have to know what they actually do, and that's what we've been finding difficult, whether you should just leave that free choice time to their real free choice and um not monitor what they've done or where they've been or whatever ... I don't know ...

> Yesterday I felt really unhappy. Gary (the Principal) came over to talk to us and I was saying that we were worried about some children with contracts and he intimated that maybe the children weren't ready for this. We felt quite upset about that. I went home last night and got really angry, came in this morning and sat down in the maths area and did lots and lots of recording of children's work and they were doing really well! I'm much happier ...

> We also kept fairly diligent records of children's writing and we had organised among ourselves the problems that parents needed answers for, such as teaching phonics ... so the parent might have said to us 'Johnny doesn't know *qu* ' and we'd say 'Johnny hasn't ever used a word with *qu* but when he needs that sound and all the print and things associated with that, we will introduce it. We didn't have it so that they had to learn a certain amount by a certain time, we provided for a fairly broad developmental range. Then we were really child spotters ...

Once they felt they had control over the more flexible physical setting they began to extend opportunities for children to make choices. They also began to examine the types of activities provided and to substitute the single objective lesson, game or worksheet familiar to parents and other teachers with learning opportunities which had multiple entry points and multiple possibilities for learning (Clay, 1986).

> Even if we expect that all the children will be at that activity they won't all be doing the same task. That is probably the main change ...

> We don't have a strict rotational morning with eight groups any longer, partly because all of the children didn't need to do all those things and that led to some restlessness. The rotation was causing some of it because they would say, 'oh no, do we have to do this' ... it was just wrong for them and it created discipline type problems ... now we have two activities which all children must do each week, and sometimes we assign special tasks for some children. They select for themselves from the rest ...
>
> We have got into the spelling approach where we go around and pick up words as they are writing. I'm finding out from the children the common spelling mistakes and getting them to actually tell us, like when they think they have three letters right or noticing that some of the letters are in the wrong order. The children are enjoying fixing up their own mistakes ...

Teachers with these concerns tended to maintain contact through network meetings possibly because they found more dilemmas arising as the months progressed. The dilemmas that the teachers now experienced had less to do with their own skill levels and the reactions of children than with reactions within the social and cultural contexts in which they worked. They reported that some parents, other teachers, or administrators voiced concern about practices associated with providing more choice for children and they began to think about strategies for communicating about the changes.

REACTIONS TO DILEMMAS

These self directed teachers involved in changing towards more flexible curriculum approaches began the process with high morale and an expectation of a smooth transition from what they referred to as their old 'subject based approach' to an approach which was responsive to 'developmental differences among children'. The experience of involvement in change was, however, much more complex than they expected. They experienced a series of dilemmas, some associated with assessing the worth of their efforts and others associated with making choices among competing options for action.

Insecurity

In the early stages teachers interpreted any difficulties they experienced in making changes in practice as personal failure. Yet their experiences and that of others involved in change (Fullan, 1987: 39) suggests that these feelings were related to factors integral to the change process.

- It takes time to change because new skills cannot be acquired without practice. These teachers who had been teaching for six or more years and who were currently accepted as good teachers reported considerable difficulty in making the changes they desired, in giving up 'bad habits' that they had once thought to be desirable skills.

- It is impossible to have the same degree of certainty about individual progress once a new way of planning for learning is adopted. The teachers found themselves with the same types of uncertainties as first year teachers - how do I know that the children are learning? This insecurity based on lack of predictability about outcomes tended to abate after a few months when it became evident that children were indeed learning.

- It is impossible to predict every consequence of a change, and constant fine tuning becomes necessary for weeks following significant changes to an aspect of the organisation of space, time, people or resources or in the style of interaction children are encouraged to seek with resources and adults.

It was important for these teachers to learn that insecurity was part of the process for all participants. Once they were able to share their experiences and note the similarities, they were able to see this as normal rather than as personal failing. As a result they were more willing to continue working on changes accepting more easily concerns about lack of predictability and unexpected

consequences.

Meshing ideals and realities

At the beginning of the change process the teachers seemed to expect that there was one best way of implementing the ideal they espoused. Yet later in the process they began to indicate an acceptance that there were many possible strategies, and that some worked better in their setting than did others. One of the reasons why the teachers found the network meetings to be so valuable was that these gave access to information about alternative possibilities while allowing the opportunity for each teacher to select in terms of their own realities.

Teachers came to accept that there was a kind of friction always underway between the ideals held and attempts to translate these into practice. Teacher abilities and past experiences influenced what became possible. The social context, that is the beliefs and values and traditions of the teachers, children, parents, administrators and others with an interest in what happened, always constituted an influence on what came to be accepted as appropriate. Responding to these influences required creative effort in order to find ways of working which were congruent with personal beliefs and knowledge yet were acceptable to others. This began to seem more like involvement in transactions about ideas and actions than a matter of translating theory into practice.

Negotiating

A few months into implementing the innovation those teachers who were extending beyond changes to the physical settings to include multiple entry learning opportunities and considerable choice for learners, became aware of the need to negotiate with others about what were to be considered appropriate ways to work with children to further their education.

From the observer perspective it seemed that the willingness of teachers to engage in negotiation had a noticeable effect on the success of their efforts. Unless the teacher was prepared to talk with others, reaching out to understand their views and working together to create acceptable practices, misunderstanding and resistance tended to eventuate. In turn the willingness of teachers to engage in negotiation seemed to depend on their perceptions of themselves in power relations with others. A few seemed to defer to people whom they considered to have higher authority than themselves and to act as an authority figure among those considered to have lower status. In the curriculum change situation this meant deferring to system level administrators and outside 'experts' then expecting parents and children to accept change without giving any opportunity for them to share their concerns.

Parents: Those who reported feeling successful in their endeavours tended to consider important the work they put into talking with parents to reach some agreement about curriculum practices. At network meetings these teachers shared ideas about brochures, workshop formats and other ways of gaining support based on reaching out to understand and to inform parents. They shared anecdotes about their efforts at negotiating with administrators, other staff in the staff room and even inspectors of schools, usually in a joking manner, but the degree of interest indicated a serious undercurrent to these anecdotes.

Children: It was interesting to note that the teachers who took seriously the need to negotiate with other adults tended to also take seriously the need to find ways of sharing responsibility for learning progress with children and the need to seek deeper understanding of each child.

Support Staff: Some of the anecdotes shared among the teachers were amusing reports on how the teachers were able to circumvent support staff who attempted to use their power over specialist services to block practices associated with the innovation. Specialist librarians, music teachers and physical education instructors were most often mentioned as people who refused to take mixed age groups because their lessons were 'specially planned for specified age groups and syllabus requirements'. At a network meeting Lenore triumphantly shared her story about how she did not

argue when the physical education instructor at the school decreed that he would not take mixed age groups. She divided the children in her mixed age class into the three groups required using size as the criteria and sent them for instruction. After some six weeks she casually inquired into the children's progress. When assured that there were no difficulties she gleefully informed the instructor about the composition of the groups. He was amused at her deception and other teachers seemed to take comfort from this story.

The Staffroom Culture: There were no amusing stories about difficulties experienced when staff at the school became critical of new practices. Those teachers who moved beyond changes to the physical settings towards increasing choice and different styles of interaction with children reported that the further they moved in this direction the more likely it became that other teachers on staff would become hostile and critical of the new practices. Teachers seemed to find evidence of hostility, of competition, of alternative images of good practice a source of much consternation. A common response seemed to be to decide not to go to the staffroom during breaks. One result may have been that these teachers found an important form of support in the network meetings where they were able to form alternative peer group cultures to the school peer group.

Inspectors and School Administrators: Teachers shared stories about inspectors, mostly stories about how they were able to persuade these authority figures that they knew what they were doing as they engaged in innovation. It seemed that those who felt capable of doing this were often quite satisfied with the response, even from reputed 'ogres' among the authority figures. Other teachers tended to modify observable behaviour at points of potential confrontation to make it look more like classroom practice that had been approved in the past. Some of the administrators from schools where the teachers worked attended network meetings so amusing stories about administrators did not figure largely in these discussions. Conversation with teachers in other settings sometimes led to comments about difficulties with administrators, but there was usually a request that the tape recorder be turned off at this point. Teachers appeared to be remarkably sensitive about their power relationships with administrators.

A Question of Gender: Almost all of the teachers in the study were female. Almost all the principals of schools where they worked were male. It could be that the societal norm of female deference to male authority figures is a very difficult one to change. The male principals who attended network meetings showed evidence of wanting to change to more equitable power relationships with the teachers, however, the teachers appeared to be taking a very cautious approach. These areas of principal/teacher power relationship and the area of school peer group cultures seemed to be sensitive areas for the teachers, talked about circumspectly.

Shared knowledge

One of the most noticeable reactions of these self directed teachers, once they began to face the day-to-day consequences of curriculum innovation, was their desire for contact with others who were involved in making similar changes. It seemed that those who were experiencing curriculum implementation as problematic had considerable interest in what their peers were doing and thinking. This reaction has been noted among other teachers working in self directed ways in curriculum innovation (Fullan, 1987; Toomey and Reynolds, 1983; Lortie, 1975).

The style of communication typical among these teachers indicated a preference for the kind of detail typical of anecdotes and stories. Time and again at the network meetings it was evident that the teachers listened with intense interest when a participating teacher, or a visitor to the meetings, recounted in story form experiences of relevance to the innovation. More analytic ways of sharing knowledge, using abstract propositional forms, models and principles, engendered much less enthusiasm. The investigator was surprised that participants considered texts especially theoretical texts, no matter how seemingly pertinent to their innovation, to be less useful than the stories. The teachers did make reference to texts and journal articles, they shared titles at meetings, but these were claimed to be of less *relevance* during the change process than anecdotes about another's experiences.

Even more useful, their actions suggested, were opportunities to observe other classrooms and to learn from the teachers involved about the reasons for the practices observed. Participants in network meetings showed every indication of eagerly awaiting the time when they were taken by teachers working in the school, for a 'tour' of rooms where the innovation was being made. The resident teachers explained the operation of the room and answers to questions were listened to intently. These tours set the scene for discussion based on sharing enthusiasms and dilemmas.

Those undertaking preservice and inservice courses which examined curriculum implementation also indicated a preference for detailed word pictures and the detail of video clips of teachers taking the viewer on a 'tour of the room' for learning about teacher experiences in implementing a curriculum. The case study of change in one school, which made extensive use of photographs and transcripts of conversations, became a popular resource as were video clips of classrooms in action and 'snippets' from transcripts indicating teachers' language for talking about the dilemmas they experienced.

The type of knowledge that was being shared has been referred to by Stake as 'particularised', the generalisations made are bounded by the particulars of teaching experience. They are generalisations "rich with the conditions of importance in making decisions about their teaching and learning. Intuitively they take into account many factors that are not included in the formal decision matrix of the social scientist." (1981: 7) It seemed that the teachers who were successful in dealing with the realities of curriculum innovation had identified a need to hear about and see practitioner accounts of their experiences with all the rich and complex conditions surrounding action.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SHARED PRACTITIONER KNOWLEDGE

The teachers had a deep interest in checking what they were doing against the actions of others. They were not looking for practices to copy but for ideas to add to their own bank of possibilities in order to make the best decisions possible in their own situation. The teachers were concerned about the quality of their own work not about competing with others and looking for experts to emulate. The following exchange at a network meeting caused considerable mirth among teachers, all of whom understood the motivation behind the comments made by this teacher in her third year of change, to a teacher just beginning to introduce more flexible forms of room arrangement.

> ... it is so good to know that there are other people out there who have the same concerns, the same worries, the same frustrations, the same sort of needs ...
>
> ... what I really liked was the day you came to our school. You looked around and you saw one of my corners that was just a mess, it really was that day, and you said, looking in the corner, "you know I'm really not that bad! " and I thought that was just fantastic. You said "I feel so much better". [explosion of laughter among the teachers] ... I remember things that happened in our first year and then look at what is happening here. It will be interesting if you guys come to the same conclusion, even though we have different teaching backgrounds. I was an upper school teacher...
>
> ... [Teacher partner] and weren't you in a panic in those days!
>
> ... Oh yes! I nearly resigned! [laughter and sighs of agreement about the level of anxiety at the beginning.]

This interest in understanding the experiences of others and personal confidence in the ability to recognise and pursue quality seems to indicate what Grundy characterises as an interest in practical curriculum development. Grundy (1987), drawing on Habermas' theory of fundamental human interests, proposes that styles of curriculum knowledge and action can be related to three interests, the technical, the practical and the emancipatory (praxis). She distinguishes between knowledge and action related to an interest in technical control over curriculum products; an interest in the

practical aspects of personal understanding, in learning through interaction, discussion and deliberation about the quality of curriculum experiences; and, an interest in 'praxis', in achieving emancipation for self and students through reflection on alternative ways of understanding the curriculum work of teachers and students and action taken to empower participants in the curriculum.

Much of the knowledge base currently provided for teachers about curriculum implementation is framed in the abstract, propositional forms of technical knowledge. Technical knowledge tends to create dichotomies between theory and practice (Donmoyer, 1989: 262) keeping teachers and student teachers in the passive role of translators of propositions generated by others and shorn of the untidy details of the contexts in which action occurs. Anecdotes about practice, photographs and video examples of practice which are used merely to illustrate generalisation within a theory lose that 'practical' sense which makes it possible for teachers to make judgements of worth for themselves.

Consideration of the comments made by teachers involved in this study suggests that an interest in practical curriculum development can best be served by providing access to practitioner knowledge in its context bound forms, allowing the practitioners to select in terms of their own theories and educational values.

> Action in the realm of human interaction (practical action) is dependent upon judgment, and the exercising of judgment is dependent upon the interpretation of the meaning of an event, which, in turn, is dependent upon the meeting and interaction of the fore-meanings or prejudices of the participants in the interaction. In the interpretation of the text the participants are the reader and the written words of the author. In the interpretation of an event the participants are all those involved in the event. Thus, practical action presupposes deliberation and negotiation. Furthermore, this view of interaction incorporates certain implications concerning the rights and the equality of the participants. In the case of textual interpretation this concept cuts across the 'tyranny of the text'; for it presupposes an active meaning-making reader who has as much right to determine the meaning of the text (though not in arbitrary or nonsensical ways) as does the author. In the realm of human interaction it presupposes active meaning-making and, ideally, equality of participants in an event. .. Thus the right of each subject to determine meaning to the extent of his/her capacity is an important principle to be safeguarded.
>
> (Grundy, 1987: 68)

Practical curriculum development involves participants taking responsibility for making judgements about the personal worth of ideas generated during interaction among participants. It was evident that the teachers and student teachers in the study took responsibility for making such judgements very seriously. They indicated that they made judgements about worth in terms of educational values and images of good curriculum for young children as well as in terms of their assessments of their own emerging abilities.

A practical curriculum interest implies using the knowledge base of practioners to inform other practitioners directly. In courses designed for interests in the practical, stories by and about practitioners at work (Smyth, 1988) would assume much greater importance. Teacher educators would spend less time defining worthwhile knowledge and practice and more time sharing experiences and values, using case studies and self-reports to provide 'vicarious' experience, to augment, or in place of, direct contact among practitioners. Fortunately there is an emerging body of literature which focuses on the practical knowledge of early childhood teachers which can be used in expanding the early childhood educator's knowledge base to include practitioner knowledge. Studies into teacher thinking about the curriculum they implement (Clandinin, 1986; Yonemura, 1986; McLean, 1986) are rich in detail about curriculum choices and their links with teacher beliefs and theories. These studies provide some detail about the contexts in which action occurs, however much more work is required in this area if practitioners are to become more knowledgeable about contexts as influences on curriculum action.

If we are to provide the self directed, creative teachers we say we value in early childhood

education it would appear that we should be providing them with the type of context bound, particularised knowledge about practice on which teachers wanting to make changes (and student teachers learning from practitioners) can make judgements in terms of their own emerging values and abilities. Practical knowledge shared 'vicariously' through case studies, ethnographies and video recorded self reports, can be empowering helping practitioners become more skilled in making informed judgements when implementing curriculum for young children in public sector settings.

WORKING IN SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXTS

Smyth (1987) has reported finding stories and anecdotes drawn from studies which investigate practitioner experiences and the role of contexts in shaping their action, to be useful in helping students to develop critical understandings about contexts as influences on the curriculum as it is implemented. He uses, for instance, stories from a study by Berlak and Berlak (1981), which focused on teacher decision making in British progressive primary schools. The study highlighted the inevitability of 'dilemmas' in decision making once teachers worked in more open, responsive ways with children. In deciding on a response to a child, consideration about the child's past experiences, effects on other children, long term effects on the child, possible parent responses, personal educational priorities and so on could all be considered, however fleetingly.

The researchers in this study noted that teachers used their knowledge about the social and cultural contexts in which they worked in deciding action. Some of these progressive primary school teachers seemed to have a degree of insight into a range of ideologies, power relations and authority structures to be considered if they wanted to implement a curriculum which supported their beliefs about good practice yet was accepted in the context where they worked. The self directed teachers who attempted to promote more choice in these Queensland early childhood settings soon identified a need to gain understanding about the beliefs and values of others impinging on their work, and skill in establishing equitable power relations with others if they were to ben able to make the changes they considered important.

Providing more choice for learners in primary schools soon created situations where teachers found they needed to develop skill in responding effectively to often conflicting expectations from people impinging on action in the classroom. The study indicated also the importance of abilities associated with negotiation and being able to create modifications to practices which made them acceptable to everyone with an interest in the curriculum encountered by the children. Those teachers who pursued practices which promoted independence and personal responsibility soon became aware that making 'practical' decision could involve more than making logical links between their beliefs, values and possibilities for action. They found that there could be other perceptions and other understandings about the underlying meanings for observed practice and the legitimacy of the 'practical' could be challenged. They learned how to work in ways that were congruent with their own images of good curriculum for children through developing strategies for establishing equitable power retationships with authority figures, peers and with those over whom they were presumed to have authority, the children.

These are the types of understanding and skill that early childhood teachers will need to develop in order to work effectively in the early childhood settings of today and the future.

CONCLUSION

Current attempts to articulate the early childhood approach to curriculum emphasise the role of developmental theory almost to the exclusion of recognition of values informing early childhood education (Spodek, 1988; Silin, 1987) and knowledge sources which would help workers in the field understand the realities of practice and the social world in which they work. The development theme has served the field, and children, very well over the last twenty years especially when communicating with policy makers and those deciding funding for public education. It would be a

tragedy, however, to find that an over-emphasis on the development theme, while successful in convincing policy makers about the importance and economic benefits of early childhood education, proves to be inadequate for practitioners working in early childhood settings. The field must begin to look seriously at the knowledge base that teachers need to ensure that they are able to implement, in everyday contexts, the kinds of curricula they believe to be important for young children.

The study reported on here suggests that teachers need access to knowledge framed in the context-rich particulars of everyday curriculum work. This practitioner knowledge will provide insight into the factors impinging on curriculum implementation and the knowledge and skills needed to take these factors into account. Access to practitioner knowledge will provide them with the type of knowledge which will enable them to make those creative adaptations necessary for ensuring that practices in use are accepted as appropriate in the contexts of action as well as by the teachers working within an early childhood education ideology.

REFERENCES

Apple, M.W. & King, N.R. (1977). 'What do schools teach?' *Curriculum Inquiry*, 6, 341-357.

Ashby, G. (1986). *Early Education Classes: Perceptions and Issues*. School of Early Childhood Studies, Brisbane College of Advanced Education, Kelvin Grove.

Battersby, D. (1988). 'Towards Critical Pedagogy in Early Childhood Education.' in *Looking Forward, Looking Back: Young Children's Place in Modern Society*. Proceedings of the 18th. National Conference of the Australian Early Childhood Association. Canberra, September 1988.

Berlak, A. & Berlak, H. (1981). *Dilemmas of Schooling*. London: Methuen.

Blenkin, G. & Kelly, A.V. (1987). *Early Childhood Education: A Developmental Curriculum*. London: Paul Chapman.

Bredekamp, S. (Ed.). (1987). *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children From Birth Through Age 8*. Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Clandinin, D.J. (1986). *Classroom Practice: Teacher Images in Action*. London: The Falmer Press.

Curriculum Services Branch. (1987). *P - 10 Curriculum Framework: for discussion purposes*. Department of Education, Queensland.

Division of Curriculum Services. (1986). *E.L.I.C. Information Booklet: Early Literacy Inservice Course in Queensland State Schools*. Department of Education, Brisbane.

Division of Preschool Education. (1984-87) *Understanding Children Series*. Department of Education, Queensland.

Donmoyer, R. (1981). 'The politics of play: ideologicial and organizational constraints of the inclusion of play experiences in the school curriculum.' *Journal of Research and Development in Education*, 14:3, 11-18.

Donmoyer, R. (1989). 'Theory, practice and the double-edged problem of ideosyncracy.' *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*, 4: 3, 257-270.

Eisner, E. (1984). 'No easy answers: Joseph Schwab's contributions to curriculum.' *Curriculum Inquiry*, 14:2, 210-210.

Elkind, D.E. (1988). *Miseducation: Preschoolers at Risk*. New York: Alfred A Knopf.

First Years of School Conference. (1988). *A Statement of Principles for the Education of Children in the Early Years of School in Australia and New Zealand: Towards a Policy Statement*. Melbourne.

Fullan, M. (1988). Plenary Session II. In D.L. Smith (Ed.) *Participation & Access: Myth and Reality?* Proceedings of Curriculum '87. Australian Curriculum Studies Association.

Giddens, A. (1979). *Central Problems in Social Theory: action, structure and contradiction in social analysis*. London: The Macmillan Press.

Grundy, S. (1987). *Curriculum: Product or Praxis? Deakin Studies in Education Series.* London: The Falmer Press.

Halliwell, G. (1981). *First Year in an Early Education Class: self reports from teachers beginning to design and implement educational programs in Early Education Classes in the North Western and South Western Regions.* Department of Education, Queensland.

Halliwell, G. (1983). 'Current curriculum practice in early childhood education in Australia', *Australian Journal of Early Childhood,* 8:1, 6-13.

Halliwell, G. (1987). *Teachers Initiating Change.* Paper accompanying the Early Literacy Inservice Course Satellite Network Broadcast, November, 1987.

Halliwell, G.& Nicoll, L. (1987). *Implementing the Curriculum in the First Years of School.* Set of four session booklets and video recordings from the satellite television continuing education course. Brisbane College of Advanced Education.

Halliwell, G. (1989). *The Leafy Woods State School Story.* Brisbane College of Advanced Education. (Note: This is a modified version of the case study for restricted circulation issued in 1987.)

King, R. (1978). *All Things Bright and Beautiful? A Sociological Study of Infants' Classrooms.* Chichester: Wiley.

Lortie, D. (1975). *Schoolteacher: A sociological study.* Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Lubeck, S. (1985). *Sandbox Society: Early Education in Black and White America.* London: The Falmer Press.

McLean, S.V. (1986). *The Human Encounter: teachers and children living together in preschools.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Arizona State University.

Olson, J.K.. & Eaton, S. (1987).. 'Curriculum change and the classroom order.' In Calderhead, J. (Ed.), *Exploring Teachers' Thinking.* London: Cassell Educational.

Open Framework Committee. (1979). *Open Framework Approaches for Developing Programs for Early Childhood Education: A Resource Kit.* Department of Education, Queensland.

Report of the Committee of Review, Education 2000 Submissions. (1986). *Education 2000: Issues and Options for the Future of Education in Queensland.* Department of Education, Queensland.

Schwab, J.J. (1969). 'The Practical: A language for curriculum.' *School Review,* 79: 4, 493-527.

Sharp, R. & Green, A. (1975). *Education and Social Control: A Study in Progressive Primary Education.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Silin, J.G. (1987). 'The Early Childhood Educator's Knowledge Base: A Reconsideration." In Katz, L. G. (Ed.) *Current Topics in Early Childhood Education.* Volume VII. Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex.

Smyth, W.J. (1987). *A Rationale for Teachers Critical Pedagogy: A Handbook.* Deakin

University Press.

Spodek, B. (1988). 'Conceptualizing today's kindergarten curriculum', *The Elementary School Journal*. 89: 2, 203-211.

Stake, R.E. (1981). 'A needed subjectivity in educational research.' *Discourse*. 1: 2. 1-8.

Tizard, B. & Hughes, M. (1984). *Young Children Learning: Talking and Thinking at Home and at School*. London: Fontana.

Toomey, R. & Reynolds, C. (1983). 'Three faces of change: the problem of curriculum change and who can change what.' *Preconference Papers. National Curriculum Conference, Shaping the Curriculum*. Adelaide.

Werner, O. & Schoeple, G.M. (1987). *Systematic Fieldwork: Foundations of Ethnography and Interviewing*. Vol. 1 Newbury Park, Calif: Sage.

Willes, M.J. (1983). *Children into Pupils: A Study of Language in Early Schooling*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Yonemura, M.V. (1986). *A Teacher at Work: Professional development and the early childhood educator*. New York: Teachers College Press.